Journal Entry #1

Auriana Anderson

October 24, 2011

Pages 1-44

Summary: The novel I am reading is called Midaq Alley by Naguib Mahfouz. This section consists of constant character and setting development. The setting takes place in Cairo, Egypt in a diminutive town where everyone knows each other by name. The town, Midaq Alley is secluded from the outside world. Throughout this section the author discusses the characters and shows their role amongst the environment. The main characters are Abba, Umm Hamida, Saniya Afify, Hamida, Jaada, Husniya, Mrs. Kirsha, Kirsha, Uncle Kamil, Salim Alwan, Dr. Booshy, Sanker, Sheikh Darwish, and Radwan Hussainy, The responsibility of most of the women is to be the house keeper. The women that do not work perform house held jobs such as cooking and cleaning as well as taking care of the children. Some of the men are disrespectful and bossy, while others are kind and considerate. The overall job being portrayed is the care giver. The men take care of everything and demonstrate the gain of power. All in all, each and every character was a strong believer of a single God. So far in the novel, nothing profligate occurred. The characters are being introduced to the reader and Abba is setting off to pursue Hamida as his girlfriend, but fails.

Analysis: During this part of the book, I felt on edge because there were a lot of characters to focus on and it was a bit difficult to comprehend. There were many words that I did not understand. I also found it odd the way the characters spoke, reacted to things and the wardrobe selection. The characters wore cloaks and rode on horses. I enjoyed the setting so far because I could imagine what it looked like through the content of the story. It greatly reminded me of a scene a movie called “The Prince of Egypt.” So far the section included sophisticated ideas. “It’s walls decorated with multicolored arabesques, now crumbling, giving off strong odors from the medicines of olden times, smells which have now become the spices and folk cures of today and tomorrow…” This is a strong quote of the intense description that is pulled out within the text.

Application: What inherent characteristics span time and culture?

The inherent characteristics that spanned time so far are the amount of work ethic, morals/values, relationships with others and life after death. The men of the town showed a great amount of work ethic and never failed to do so. Every man has a special role in the society. “The barbershop, although small, is considered in the alley to be rather special.” The section then began to explain the value of the shop, and how the barber took pride in himself. The relationships with each of the characters were very questionable. A few of the town’s people were stuck up and lied to get what they wanted. Hamida was a beautiful woman and took the people around her for granted. She only searched for a man of wealth. “The truth was she neither loved him nor wanted him; at the same time she could not dismiss him.”

Having a higher power to believe in and life after death took a large toll in the section. “We are all sons of Adam. If poverty descends on you then seek help from your brother. Man’s provider is God and it is to God that any excess is due.” All of the examples and ideas are large portions of the development of the characters in their culture and time.

Journal Entry #2

Auriana Anderson

October 24, 2011

Pages 45-80

Summary: At the beginning of this section, a larger amount of information on Mr. Kirsha is revealed. He is a café owner who illegally buys and sells hashish. He spoke about his love for it and says that God is okay with him using it. Mr. Kirsha feels as if it is the only thing that keeps him together. On the other hand, Mr. Kirsha has ways that are unacceptable. He is attracted to young boys. “Mr. Kirsha smiled, or rather his mouth split open mechanically; this was accompanied by a slight twitching of his eyebrows.” Mr. Kirsha later watch the young boy then followed him to make conversation. As they were conversing, Mr. Kirsha asked the boy where he lived and invited him to stop by his café. “Will you come?” He was very excited and insisted the young boy show up.

Later another character is introduced. His name is Zaita and lives outside of the bakery. Zaita is a crazy man that people go to when they feel that all hope is lost. His job is to operate on people to make them crippled so they can have pity. Those people are named the beggars. Zaita is one who is not liked because of his odor. He does not wash or groom himself. He is very poor, but the beggars look up to him.

A person that most people look up to is a new character named Salim Alwan, the wealthy businessman. Salim has a wife and two sons and is very successful. He recently survived a heart attack, so he has great pride in himself, his family and his business. One thing about him that is disappointing is that he is looking for a new wife; a younger wife.

Analysis: I honestly do not like how this novel introduces so many characters. It is hard to understand and remember who is who. I have also noticed that the chapters don’t transition. They just go from one topic to the next without comparison. So when I have to summarize what I read, it doesn’t flow or relate. I am not into this book at all.

Application: What inherent human characteristics span time and culture?

In this section, the characteristics that were present were greed, self esteem, and need for wealth. Salim Alwan is a man that has everything he could ask for. He is doing very well with is business, his health and his family. He doesn’t need anything more, but he yearns for Hamida. He wants to take her hand in marriage because she is young and beautiful. He is being very greedy and inconsiderate on his wife. For example, the text states “The desire of a fifty-year-old man, a husband and father, for a girl in her twenties.” This is showing the lack of appreciation for his wife. As far as self esteem goes, the beggars of the story have no pride or honor. They immediately resort to feeling pity. “I am never successful at a job. I have tried all kinds of work, even being a beggar. My luck is bad and my mind is worse. I can never understand or remember anything.” This man has a very low self esteem and doesn’t feel as if he is worth anything. In the life of the Midaq Alley, money means a lot to people, though many of them do not have much of it. The people believe that with more money, there are less worries.

Journal Entry #3

Auriana Anderson

January 6, 2011

Pages 80-145

Summary: In this section of the novel, Mrs. Kirsha portrays her husband to be a man committing adultery. She noticed a lot of distance and strange acts between them, but didn’t want to accuse him for anything because as a woman, she was out of place.

The story goes on to explain her attributes and her family. She was the type of woman that put her husband in his place, but respected his authority at the same time. They had daughters who were grown and married, but one of them got in trouble with the law. In many ways, they struggled with the absence of their daughter and tried to get over the disgrace that they saw. The young woman was the talk of the town for a while, but the rumors and truths had finally disappeared. Her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Kirsha felt as though she dishonored the family name.

This story is told from Mrs. Kirsha’s view point in this section, so it continued to display the hardships of her life. There were a lot of things that she tried to hide from the community. Finally having the courage to speak with her husband about the allegations she felt were essential to their relationship, they argued, but decided it best to drop the situation, even though that wasn’t the last of Mrs. Kirsha’ suspicion.

Analysis- I thought this part of the book was very suspenseful. At the beginning of the book, I didn’t know how to relate to the characters or even the setting. Within this section, I understand where the main character of the section, Mrs. Kirsha is coming from. I’ve had to deal with a lot of situations similar to hers. This book is seemingly more realistic than I anticipated. It seemed like she acted in the dame manor I would have, if I were married.

Application- What inherent human characteristics span time and culture?

This section of the book is applied to the essential question very significantly because quite a few of the characteristics are introduced. Emotion, relationships with others and morals and values were clearly included.

With great emotion, the situation that Mrs. Kirsha had to face is specifically poignant because of the loyalty she had lost from her husband. The suspicion was very emotional for her even though she had to keep her true feelings of distress and disappointment internal. Trust was definitely dismissed after the various uncertainties from her husband. The novel directly reads, “The woman tossed her unhappy memories over in her mind, and in the pain which so embittered her life returned.” She was more than just a character, but a well rounded woman of passion and frustration.

Leading to relationships with others, the summary evidently shows the reality of the situation. No relationship is perfect and there are many affects based on the respect partners give each other. Mr. Kirsha is obviously not a man of that. After ranting about what he wanted, his wife said, “Do you want me to give up my whole life?” It seemed as though, their relationship was no longer strong and power and pride of a man took over. Her life was seemingly revolving around her husband.

Undoubtedly the morals of living a disciplined family life were not prevalent. Throughout the change in the world, the effects from years in the past and now are beginning to straighten out. There are many similarities to the past of human characteristics and now.

Journal Entry #4

Auriana Anderson

January 6, 2011

Pages 145-229

Summary: Within the context of this section, the journey and ambition of a different character was brought to light. A Muslim man named Salim Alwan, went out of his way to pursue a woman named Umm Hamida to be his wife. He was fascinated by the fashion, respect and personality of a woman named Umm Hamida.

The odd part is that he already had a wife, but he warned his wife that he was in search for another if God allowed it. His religion allowed him to have more than one wife so he decided to take full advantage of it. There was more than just the single attraction of beauty in Umm, that Alwan saw.

Umm was surprised by the reaction of the Alwan because they saw each other every day in just a friendly aspect. She stated, “You are thinking of going as far as that, Mr. Alwan?” It was apparent that the grown man wanted to marry her as well and he explained himself.

Analysis: I think this part of the selection is okay in the aspects that the book is coming alive. There were a lot of great words used to describe ideals throughout the story. I think that the imagery has powers to clear up the value of the setting and characters.

Application: What inherent human characteristics span time and culture?

The key characteristics to define the essential question are appreciation, and emotion. Alwan went out of his way every day to be polite to Umm because he felt some emotion towards her. It was more than just her appearance that he saw in her, but the way she carried herself was like no other. Understanding the nature of humans and the reactions they make is continuously driven to understand the inherent characteristics.

The personality of Alwan and the respect he gave off was fairly unsual. “Well, Mr. Alwan, you are a very important person indeed. Men like you are rare these days.” Relating this quote into a time period or frame, it feels like the world is evolving to be more similar to the past. In many cases now, characteristics of humans can directly be related to the past as time spans.

Appreciation has been falling out of context in time and even culture. This section is related in ways that are physical, social and emotional. For example, the reading states that “you are a good woman and I’m attracted to you.” In this world, words passed around like this are not too common. Men more than wisdom, ambition and character from a female. There is much to be contrasted and compared from the characteristics inherited from the span of time.

Journal Entry #5

Auriana Anderson

January 6, 2011

Pages 229-286

Summary: In the last section of the book, Umm Hamida gets married. She gets married to a man that she had been friends with for a while, but after all of that time, she still didn’t really know him. He wasn’t the person she thought he was in the end. It seemed as if she wasn’t good enough for her husband because she was in a lower class.

Feeling resentment, she thought about the Muslim guy, Alwan and spilled out her feelings to him. His choice of words inspired her and she began to actually fall for him.

Ironically, Umm divorces her husband and starts to date Alwan and plan for marriage, as he had hoped to begin with. The situation was much unexpected, but frighteningly sudden.

Analysis: In my opinion, what Umm did was intolerable. Just like in many relationships now, the outcome doesn’t settle as they should. The relationship with religion doesn’t seem like it is blown full force. Umm basically dismissed her husband because she was insecure about herself and her husband wasn’t as embracing as she expected. I think, with work, they could’ve worked everything out.

Application: How does human inherent characteristics span time and culture?

The main characteristics in this section that are prevalent to the essential question are rebellion and self esteem. Because of the lack of confidence and self-assurance, a marriage failed. The span throughout the American culture has progressively been related to Umm’s actions because the influence of having no pride and turning away from situations has expanded in time significantly. Umm rebelled and resituated herself. “Her instinctive reaction was to rebel.”

In the text it states, “She had no happy memories of the past and was now quite engrossed in the enjoyable present.” Culture has not changed considerably because this passage is showing the easy way out of situations, which is directly related to the way people think today. There are people that marry several times without discipline or consequence. There are many characteristics shown within the reading, but emotion and self esteem are above all in this section. Perfection is unattainable.